

Interview Transcript

Project: Mount Saint Mary's University--CSJ Oral History Project

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Interviewee: Sister Michelle Marie Morris

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Roman Zenz, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University

Location: Carondelet Center, Los Angeles, California.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:02.22] MARY TRUNK: This is Sister Michelle, our third interview of today, 10/17/19.

[00:00:11.13] SHANNON GREEN: And this is Shannon Green, Director of the CSJ Institute at Mount Saint Mary's, filming the CSJ Oral History Project at Carondelet Center with Mary Trunk and Roman Zenz, interviewing Sister Michelle Marie Morris, at 1:15 in the afternoon.

[00:00:27.01] SHANNON GREEN: Would you please start us out by stating your full name and your age?

[00:00:30.23] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Sister Michelle Marie Morris, 86.

[00:00:34.24] SHANNON GREEN: Sister Michelle, would you just tell us where you were born and a little bit about your family background?

[00:00:40.03] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Only lived there actually until I was seven, because we moved--my dad moved around quite a bit. And it was also--I was born in '33, so we were leading up into the war [World War II] that was going to be happening when I was about seven. So, we--he went on to California, and while he was in California--and I had a sister by then, too--there were two of us--we went to Parker, South Dakota, which is just thirty miles from Sioux Falls. Everybody knows where Sioux Falls is. But Parker is one of those little towns. And at the time they only had one light in the city, and it was run by battery. It was a really small town. But it was a neat place to be when you're seven years old. And we stayed there--my mom, my sister and myself. And--well, my dad got us established on an apartment and a house, actually here in Southern California--Los Angeles, California. And when he was ready for us, and established and had a job and all those kind of things, we went to California. And the hardest part of that was, I had a really neat dog--her name was Patsy. Everyplace I went she went. I'd be on the floor--she'd sleep on my back, those kinds of things. And I had to leave her behind. So, that's the only sad part I remember about leaving. Otherwise, it was an adventure, because we pooled with another family who was coming to California, and that's how we got here. And it was actually--I still remember it was the one house that we lived in the longest. And we were there--we were there by the time in '41, it was just before the war, actually.

[00:02:32.17] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: And the public school that I went to was really a neat school. Just happened that so many of teachers there were Catholics. And I went there in the third grade, and my sister was in the first. And went there until I was in the sixth grade. And at that time, I hadn't made my Sacraments yet, other than be baptized, because we moved around too much. So, I got into that release program that they have, with the public schools, and they take you

to the nearest Catholic school--I was right on the border of Transfiguration parish and St. Cecilia's parish. But the school actually took us to St. Cecilia's. And that's the first time--I didn't know anything about Sisters. And that's the first time I met us. And I still remember my--the wonderful Sister that prepared me for the Sacraments. In fact, her name was Sister Margaret Alocoque Callahan, and she just celebrated her Feast Day yesterday. So, anyway, she prepared me for the Sacraments, and at that time, before you've made your first Communion, you had your first Confession. So, the pastor of that parish was Father Brady--really a neat priest. A lot of people were afraid of him, but I don't know, kids seem to have a way with grumpy priests. He really wasn't. But when I told him I'd been to a Protestant Bible camp that summer, because I had Protestant--I don't even think that way. Protestants and Catholics, whatever. I'd gone to this wonderful camp. I learned a lot about the Bible--a lot about lots of things. That's a whole story in itself. And you could write a book about it, so we won't do that. But what he did tell me was, you come to my school. Okay? I left the confessional, came over to St. Cecilia's, which I knew nothing of--never seen the Sisters, didn't even know Sisters. And the school is set up so that the main floor is actually a second floor. So, I was on ground level looking up at the windows, and the transoms were all open. So, I yelled up, I said, "Is anybody there?" And Sister stuck her head out the window--it was Sister--happened to be [Sister Teresa Louise ??], she was the Principal and eighth-grade teacher. And I said--didn't introduce myself, nothing--I just said, "Father Brady said I could come to your school." And that was how I got in. Went home and told my mom and dad--didn't even ask them. And came to St. Cecilia's in the seventh grade and eighth grade.

[00:05:00.25] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: And that's when I first really met our Sisters. And I loved everything about them. This particular group of Sisters--they're all great. But this was quite a combination. They had so much fun. And you wanted--I wanted to be around them. So did the other kids. And they were very nice to us, and personal. If they gave us a job to do, like after school or something like that, they didn't just give us the job and then disappear. They might for a little bit. But they came back and that kind of chatting went on. So, that's how I came to know the Sisters of St. Joseph for the first time. It's also the time I knew what I wanted to be. Because I wanted to be and have what they had, and still have. I'm still very touched by the community spirit and the way we treat each other. Like, we really like each other. [laughs]. We care about each other. That was the great attraction.

[00:06:05.04] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: There's other things that happened dramatically. I went on to go to St. Mary's Academy for two years. But we had a tragedy in the house, big one--my sister was killed. And that made big changes in the house, which means we went back to the Midwest where we came from for a two-year interim. And luckily, I started out in a public school in Sioux Falls--we were back to Sioux Falls again. But my auntie, who lived--who's my dad's sister--and the Catholic background of our family--called to say that her son, my cousin was at the Seminary and she had an extra room. So, could I come live with her? They were asking my parents if I could do that. And the answer was yes. So, I got to--that's how I got to Sioux City, Iowa. And I graduated from Sioux City from Heelan [Bishop Heelan] Catholic High School, the first central Catholic high school in the Midwest. And that was another nifty thing. God was really watching out for me and everybody else. We started that school. You know, it was a real adventure. Everybody was new, because they closed the girl's academy and the guy's academy, and then combined them, and so we were all new to each other. And we were making history--all sorts of history that year, because we were the "Catholic-ers" and then you had the "Protestant people". You know, and there was great rivalry between Heelan Catholic and the public schools. And it--also, we had the biggest gymnasium in the city at that time--of Sioux City. So, when they had major sports--like they had the Golden Gloves tournament there--that particular time? And our young guys, some of the seniors, were in that. So, different things like that happened. And we made history all the time. I also made very good friends with a lot of the faculty--different priests became--they were sort of

my protectors, so to speak. The first year it worked out with me staying with my auntie, but my cousin came back from the seminary, so she didn't have the extra room. So, the priest got me a really nifty place with a wonderful Catholic family--the McBride's. And they lived up in the south--the north side, and so I was quite close to Heelan--Catholic. So, I had that experience--loved it. And as I said, the priests were like my brothers. In fact, I worked for one of them. I learned how to use the switchboards where you plug them in and do all that kind of stuff. So, I learned and did that. And I was also the--and I put it in quotes [makes air quotes]--the little secretary to the person in charge of discipline of the school--the priest--Father [Lenz?]. And my job was to take the notes that the kids wrote, or their parents were supposed to have written them--of why they were not at school. I really got to know these priests, and it was a wonderful thing.

[00:09:12.12] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: In fact, I knew I wanted to enter the convent though, and I needed--I was--I had to get my own keep. My folks were off. They wanted me to go with them, but I did not want to go with them because I knew they'd just be--when I say "roaming"--they like adventure and they'd go for different places, and they were both talented, and so they never had any trouble getting jobs--you know, that kind of thing? But with myself, I knew that I really wanted to get back to Los Angeles, because we entered and still do on September 15th, the Feast of our Lady of Sorrows. So, I went to the--they were having a play day at the school. And I went to this priest friend of mine who was the disciplinarian. I said, "You know, I need to get a job. Is it okay if I don't come to play day and I go get a job?" And he did. He gave me the--and I got a job--I got it--another adventure. In other words, I was prepared. I had to move out of that other place because I was getting ready to leave period--so I got a room for a month, because we got out of school in--we graduated in what--June? And I was out of the city--I left a month before September 15 to come here and to be with my friends, and to spend the last month with them. And then I came here, and my home base part of that time was with my Protestant side of the family. But they were like my brother and sister, because they were young--the younger branch. My uncle--he really was--I learned a lot from him. But he brought me here. He was the one who brought me here. And he gave me his card. They made organs and tuned organs in the state--big--what do they call those big ones? The pipe organs. But he said to me, if you ever want to leave, just send me this card, and I'll come get you. Well, needless to say, I never left. I really liked being what I am. And--

[00:11:21.05] SHANNON GREEN: That whole time you were in South Dakota for your latter half of your high school, you knew you were going to--

[00:11:27.27] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I did. I did know I wanted to come back. I dated--all those things, but they knew what I wanted--that I was really going to be coming back here.

[00:11:28.21] [Director adjusts microphone].

[00:11:38.12] SHANNON GREEN: Were you able to stay in touch with the community? Did you have a Sister here--

[00:11:41.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I did. Sister Eloise Therese [Sister Eloise Therese Mescall (1919-2001)?], who has died since. She was my contact person here, because they gave you a list of things and you've got to do this and different things to be prepared when you come. And she took care of that. Plus my priest friend--

[00:11:57.15] [Director moves camera off interviewee.]

[00:11:57.15] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: He was very well known in the area. A lot of them

were. So, he had doctor friends. And you have to do different things. And all of that went just like that [snaps fingers]--very smoothly. But as again--even though I loved the Sisters, I didn't really know anything about Sisters. I'd only seen one in my life that I remember, and I was just a little kid--I must have been about--three or four years old. And I remember seeing a Sister. And she was--and I do remember--it was white, what she was wearing. And I never did know what order it was. So, when I did go back, and knew what was going on, to South Dakota, it was at the cathedral where I went, and that's where I found out. I should have known anyway, but I didn't. They were the Dominicans. So, I did trace that out. That's the only knowledge I had of Sisters, other than that I wanted to be one. So, that's how that went.

[00:12:54.20] SHANNON GREEN: Sounds like you had to be quite independent and mature at a pretty early age.

[00:13:00.10] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I could run a household by the time I was eight. My father was in the War, went away. My mom was "Rosy the Riveter". My sister and I managed the household, walked a block or two to school, came back. And one thing about our family--we had a great trust of each other. When my mom and dad told us they didn't want somebody in the house, there wasn't anybody in the house. We had house rules. Family stuff stayed with family. Good strong rules. And we'd wait for my mom to come home, and we all had to walk a block up to the bus stop where she'd get off. And she would be getting off, and we'd meet her. And sometimes we'd go to the restaurant on the same block, that kind of--it was all small neighborhood while my dad was gone. You know, that was--so yes, I've been independent. I always wanted to learn things. Like I wanted my mom to teach me how to iron. And the first thing you how to iron is flatware. But my dad used to wear two white shirts a day. That's--and they had to be ironed. So, I did learn later--it wasn't just seven when that happened or eight--but I did learn how to do white shirts and different things. But--and when I entered the convent I wanted to know a lot of stuff too. Like, for instance, I wanted to know how they made the altar breads. And we did make them at that time. So, I went to the Mistress of Novices and asked her if I could learn how, and they let me. I did learn how to do it. Different things like that.

[00:14:31.28] SHANNON GREEN: Curious mindset.

[00:14:33.05] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Yes, and I'd go after--usually what I want--what I'm interested in. I was an athlete. My mom never told me until after the fact that different people wanted to train me or those kinds of things. Which was a good thing. I also loved dogs. The neighbor's dogs actually were mine and I'd train them to come in through my bedroom window. [laughs]. And my mom--this one dog was "Binky"--she was a little a bulldog--a wonderful--a boxer. Every place I went that dog went. And I was supposed to get a puppy. But I didn't know that my mom had talked the lady out of giving one. We didn't need one. I had one without owning one. So, kind of wherever I go, animals seem to come. So, that's that part of it. [laughs].

[00:15:25.15] SHANNON GREEN: How did it feel to enter? Do you remember those days as a postulant and a novice?

[00:15:31.14] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Yes, I do. The whole thing--this sounds crazy--but the whole thing was just an adventure for me--day by day, just going with the flow. And I didn't have to unlearn anything. There wasn't anything to unlearn. I didn't know anything. And I just knew this--I wanted to go to heaven. And I figured if I entered the convent I'd have less chance of going to hell. [laughs]. You know? I didn't want to be--I wanted to be with the group that's going onward and upward. So, no, life was--it was different. In fact, when I got the habit, that was the exciting part--getting a new name--which I chose "Michelle Marie". My secular name was "Ann Lee Morris".

And I only had that name until I was eighteen. And so, afterwards, when we could change our name, I decided I wanted to keep Michelle Marie, because I also like that thing in the Scripture where a new life is given, like names were changed--Abraham--Abram to Abraham, and so forth. And I liked that, and I figured that's what I wanted too. I was having a change--another calling. So, I've kept Michelle Marie in that sense. But I can remember how awed I was by the habit, because we'd hang it up--at night it would be hung up. And I'd look at it. Took me a long time to realize that, hey, you know, that's my habit. That's what I'm going to be wearing. And it's always been--the whole religious life, in one sense, is a great mystery. And it stayed that way for me. I love it, and I love our Catholic faith. I've loved almost everything I've done. And you move from one thing to another thing, going with the flow.

[00:17:30.19] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: But I think the thing that probably influenced me the most, or at least shattered me the most, and something I had to really get used to, was when you change too quick, something. I saw two big things happen. One was a religious order was cancelled out almost by the swipe of a pen. And that brought big thoughts to my own mind. I said, "You know, God, I mean, how do you--if that happened to somebody else it could happen to us." That did go through my head, but I kept saying, "I'm vowed to you." That kind of thing. But that was an uprooting thing that took place. And the other uprooting that took place was with Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)]--changes and all this kind of thing. And I found out--I felt sort of free-floating and I was at a talk once. I couldn't figure out what was wrong. And I really didn't know who to talk to, or even if I knew how to talk. But I heard a talk given by one of the professors--can't think of her name now--but I never forgot what she said. Because she was talking about "uprootedness" and what it felt like--you're free-floating and nothing seems to fit. And she gave a term to it--and she called it "anomie" [spells it]. As soon as I heard it, I--that settled me--I knew what was wrong. And that was enough for me. And throughout my life, if I've ever felt that way, it's always because too much of a change too fast, and getting settled. So, that really was a salvation point for me, knowing what was wrong, and that nobody else could settle that. It's something you have to work out within yourself. And I think you become stronger because of the experience or living through it.

[00:19:23.06] SHANNON GREEN: So, about Vatican II--how long--do you remember how long had you been in this life when the changes started--

[00:19:29.29] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I didn't work out the math, but I entered in '51, and those happened in '65, so--.

[00:19:35.22] SHANNON GREEN: So, you were settled into religious life. Some of the Sisters we interviewed--who entered in the '60s--. So, it sounds like that was disruptive--.

[00:19:46.02] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: It was disruptive. I didn't know how disruptive it would be to change my habit. I was one of the last of the young to change my habit. And I didn't change it for other reasons. It never bothered me. It never stopped me from doing what I wanted to do. But one time--I was teaching seventh grade at the time--and I was working with the brothers that were at another Catholic high school. It was in the Valley. Anyway, this brother was coming down and we were both working in my classroom with some electronics stuff that--that's not what's important. What's important is, he told me--and I don't know how it came up in conversation--but he said to me, "I'm awed by you." And he was awed by me because of the habit. Right then and there I made my decision and I changed within a very short amount of time, because I didn't want somebody--that it would be the habit, you know, that would--. And to be somebody my own age--we were both young. And for him to say that was an eye-opener for me. And it was the eye-opener that I needed to take the last step which was change my habit, which I

did. So, that was another--but I didn't find that easy in the beginning.

[00:21:02.22] SHANNON GREEN: Were there other things about the Second Vatican Council that were either exciting for you or otherwise disruptive for you? Liturgy changes, changes in community life?

[00:21:13.11] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I'm a person that can usually go with change. I can't say so, because I certainly got stuck with the habit, meaning I didn't move quick on that one. But I certainly like beginnings, going deeper, and I found it exciting. And the liturgy changes didn't bother me at all. But you meet and greet people that are at different stages and you just-- hopefully, we all put up with each other in the speed in which we can accept change or even if we can accept it. But no, I found that exciting. It changed my life, because I was teaching at the time-- I've done a lot of different things--but I wanted to move with the Church, and they needed parish coordinators, so I got into that. Again, doing things--they were firsts. And while I was in that, that's when I met a priest who was--the parish was in established. It was in Orange County--Holy Spirit Catholic parish. They didn't even have a church yet. They were operating out of a--well, it was a church school. They had folding doors and the thing would change after the Masses, and then there was a school there. Nothing. And so, that's where I went. They needed somebody there. And I liked the idea of going there and really starting something, getting the Catholic education going in that parish and school, which I did. And so, that happened, and all again because of Vatican II. And being able to live not in your own community house. Because our order wasn't out there--our congregation. I lived with the Irish Mercies, which was another adventure. It's something--cultures are different. And the Irish superior there was a very wise woman, because she told me--you know, so many times if you're skins are different colors, you're more--you realize that there is a different here, not just with the color of the skin, but a culture can be different, and you see it differently. Whereas when everybody is a Caucasian, so to speak--and she was wise enough to tell me, you know, our cultures are very different. And so, that was another thing. They had to get used to me--[laughs]--and I had to get used to them. And I'm really sorry that I didn't keep a little booklet, because those Irish, they know how to tell stories. And they really have cute idioms. Like I can remember, we'd be at the kitchen table, and they'd--this house, particularly were very particular about tea and how to make it. And they also brought it in--they had it imported. But I can remember the Sisters--the pot would start making a noise and she'd say, "Will someone please put that pot out of its pain?" [laughs]. Different things like that--all sorts of idioms.

[00:24:02.24] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: So, I was there for four or five years. And then, the call came again. I went to another parish for a year. But the big call, which I've been involved in for the last 37 years, was when I was at another parish in the South Bay. Most of my working time has been in the South Bay. I taught in the South Bay elementary school, Catholic school, and Bishop Montgomery high school. And then later, because the need was there, and again it was one colossal adventure from beginning to end--because housing and things like that--I was learning. We were giving parish renewal weekends--I was doing that with a priest. Very intensive weekends. And I felt what they had the power of doing was waking people up. But I think we're very irresponsible if we wake people up and then don't have something to have them do, because they want to be involved in the Church. So, at that same time, I was learning about the homelessness in the South Bay--that young people were sleeping under the piers in Santa Monica--in Manhattan Beach and Hermosa [Beach]. And we knew we needed housing. So, that's the whole thing that started me going. I knew we needed something.

[00:25:25.10] SHANNON GREEN: May I pause you there, and before we dive into that. Would you--I would love to hear a little more about just your parish experience, and what it was like. You were

kind of in the first generation of what we now might call lay ecclesial ministers, or women and religious. Just any other reflections on that--what that experience was like to be a part of that movement?

[00:25:51.15] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Well, I was in Holy Spirit parish--the whole thing--that's another thing. When you start something new, you don't have any unlearning to do. Everything's moving forward, and everybody's appreciative of what's happening. And everybody's a part of it, you know? So that when I went to Holy Spirit, they had--I told you it was the church and the school were shared. And what you had were these big folding doors, and you made classrooms out of them, that kind of thing? So, it was fun for me, because I didn't have anyone telling me what to do. [laughs]. You get to use your own talents. And you have learned--you learn all along the way when you're teaching school--and I did for lots of years. And I had wonderful directors and people that were professionals, and you become a professional. And we were well-trained. Sisters of St. Joseph are really well-trained and prepared for jobs. Like, they didn't just turn us loose in a classroom. We had classroom teaching. We had our expert teachers come in. We had all the tools needed to be successful. And I feel that everything I've ever done I've taken the good out of what was there and I made it a part of me, so I've used every skill I learned as a teacher in doing new things. You know, how to organize, how to get other people to do things--that's the key, is getting your volunteers--knowing that they're a part of it and we're all working together. And it's not hard to motivate parents, because they love their children so much. So, that was the motor--the force that was pushing us. Plus, at the time, with the Vatican II, there were problems, because as I said, it doesn't matter whether you're a priest--no matter what garb you're wearing--secular, priest, whatever--people change at different times. And so, even just the minor--well, I say minor now, because it's accepted--but even just the minor change to either receive Communion in the hand or mouth, which people were--that was a big thing that had to be brought around. Even the pastors sometimes, it was hard bringing them around. Or, it was our job actually--because we learned more about the religious--the changes that took place in the teaching of religion--than some of the priests. Because they weren't being prepared to teach the kids. They're prepared to give homilies and that kind of thing. So, there was that going on. Trying to reconcile and be together with the one thing, which is to be better people, to be better towards--the big commandment--love one another as I have loved you. That was the big thing. And it--those are things--and nothing's easy. It's not easy. There're hurts, and you learn from those, too. You know--you--there's mountains to climb. And then things look good and then you get prepared for the next wave that's going to knock you down. But you pick yourself up and you keep going.

[00:29:04.08] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: So, I liked the parish experience, but also, I liked even better starting something new. And I was the one that made it go. But it wasn't just me, and I know that. I know, with another kind of knowledge, that God has his finger on me. There's lots of times where people around me died and I didn't. Could have been me but it wasn't. Or other things have happened in my life where I've survived and somebody else didn't. Those kinds of things. Or, I've made a mistake, and sometimes you think it's an irreparable one, and somehow God can fix it and he does fix it, if he wants you. If you're doing his will. So--

[00:29:58.21] [Video blacks out].

[00:29:58.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: That was the whole thrust and challenge of starting--it's called "The House of Yahweh". It's still going on. It's not under my sponsorship anymore. I was the CEO, if that's the shortcut for it. But I started it. And I like starting things. And everything is an adventure. I'm a person that doesn't know what I did yesterday, but I can tell you the who, what, where, when and why of forty years ago, of this happened, that happened, who brought it about, how it happened, and God's finger being there. There--it's just there like a book.

I'll just give you an example--one example. I learned to incorporate a business isn't easy--to get one started. And I had a lawyer friend--you make contacts all the different places you've been, and I was lots of different places. But the last place that made--that really helped a lot when it came to getting the House of Yahweh going, was Fountain Valley, because I met people like lawyers and CPOs and people like that. So, I thought a lawyer was helping me get the House of Yahweh going, but his wife--I used to golf with her and we were good friends--she said, "He's not getting that done." [laughs]. She wasn't putting him down, she was just saying he's too busy. So, I called him on the phone, and I said, "How're things going?" And at least I found out where he was, and he was in his office. And I knew nothing was going to happen. So, I packed up all my stuff, got in my car, went to Orange County, to Irvine, to his office, and he always welcomed me, because I was a friend of theirs. And I said, "Pat, I know you're not going to be able to go on with this. So, will you give me everything you got and let me take it with me?" Actually, he was really--but he taught me something that most people don't know--that you can get incorporated in one day. Well, I ran with that. And it happened. I mean, I--but that's an example. Another one's trying to get your bulk mailing permit. People like me can't usually--

[00:32:04.17] [Video restored].

[00:32:04.17] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: --get it. Other people that have other contests can, so I had another one. You ask the persons in the field, and they can open doors, and they fill out the forms real quick, and things happen. That happened all along the way. And when we went to the post office to get the number that would be ours, our bulk mailing one--can you imagine what the number was? One. Now who's going to get one. All that came to my mind--and I think I must have danced in the post office--is alpha and omega. I knew God's finger was there. And it's all through--all through with the House of Yahweh. And it's going--food, clothing, shelter--it's evolved. Our symbol is the seed and the burning bush. Things grow slowly, surely. And I had--I was always writing letters up here. And the two provincials that were involved were Catherine Marie [Catherine Marie Kreta '61] and Kathleen Mary [Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy]. And things were going so fast. Usually it doesn't. You have all your struggles and believe me, I had them. I even had to get permission to think from the people. They tried to--well, why are you doing this--blah--different things like that. But any time things were--and also Sister Pat Rosholt [Sister Patricia Rosholt aka Sister Mary Ellen Rosholt] was up here. She was the Treasurer, and I was always in close touch letting them know what was going on. This was--lots going on. And needing this or needing that, and their support--I always, always well-supported here. And then, Sister Diane [Sister Diane Smith, CSJ Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator], with the Justice--you write grants and we did--lots of people, they need so many things. But any time I ever wrote up here, if it fit the picture, they not only gave me what we needed for the people, it was instant. I didn't have to wait for weeks. It would go to the--it's well organized, you know? They have a Board of people that decide. So, all I can say about my community is how supportive they are in the mission, and how much--through instrumentality different ones of us--that we worked through each other and touched people's lives. Because nothing just happens by yourself. I'm wise enough to know that. I had all the people I needed around me. They make you look good. But the real good's out there, and then the people that you touch. And you never know at the time who you're touching. But little things come back to you, or a person that you haven't seen--I met somebody just the other day and she said, "You don't remember me, do you?" I knew the face, but at the moment I couldn't think of her. And they've got their story--something that you've done. But--I'm the kind that when you do something, there's no strings attached--you do it and you give it. But the people don't forget it. And they love the House of Yahweh.

[00:34:59.18] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: And we call it the House of Yahweh, and the symbol is this burning bush, but it's always been God's house. And it got named with another



person when we were starting it, doing all the ground work that had to take place--get the property, do this, do that. Her name was Lyndon Reed. Very into social justice and things like that. She died. But we spent hours together. And this particular time, always talking. You slept, ate and drank what you were doing. It was just so much a part of you, and hopes and that kind of thing. But we were praying the 23rd Psalm, the translation from the Jerusalem Bible. And the second to the last line is, "My home, the House of Yahweh, forever". That's when we named it. It became the House of Yahweh then, and still now. So, it's--the time--time has a way of elongating and going like that [moves hands in and out], just depends what's going on. But it's been quite an adventure. And I have my community to thank, for first of all, letting me be there. I wasn't bringing in--it wasn't the money--it's never been the money, although it sure helps. [laughs].

[00:36:21.14] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember when you kind of became--you mentioned a little bit about with the parish, how you used to encounter the issues around housing. Were you awake to kind of the issues of social justice by then, or do you remember kind of how you came--how that came to be a passion for you? Was it just exposure to the issue, and seeing--

[00:36:42.27] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: You know, if you try to get me down on labels and stuff like that, and was I this or was I that--I'm a person that meets the need of the moment. I live in the moment. I really--I might be all these different things you talk about, but I wouldn't be able to hang a label on it with me. Right now, I'll give you an example in social justice that I could really be passionate about, is getting clean water and wells dug. Costs \$5,000 to do that. But something like that--to think that we don't have to even think about water. But that's--if that's so--and I think it is a form of social justice, that people deserve to have clean water. So, if I had to take a stance on something today, I think I'd probably get on that thing. I think I'd go around to a lot of wealthy people and ask them for money or even sponsor a well--just different things, or get the word out. And it's not always your rich that do it, I've learned that too. It's little bits make big bits on a consistent level. Because the House of Yahweh, we depended--that was another thing, was the miracle of it--we depended on donations and volunteers. Nothing--you know, we--it carried itself. But if I ever needed help--I'm trying to remember--I could have gotten any loan up here if I'd wanted it, or if I needed it, or found out I got it and then didn't need it and would give it back. So, it's just a case of reaching out in the moment. And the long-range, if I had to label it, is housing. It's still the most--it's the most desperate need right now going on. We're even talking about it here, but in a different way. So, I think my whole life--I think social justice comes in with just the person walking down the street. Like, if somebody wants money, I don't care anymore--I'm not saying, well, they're going to use this for--I don't care what they use it for. If somebody's humble enough that they're going to put their hand out and beg for money, and it looks like they're going to need it, I don't hesitate to give them something and not wonder what they're going to do with it. And I think that is--maybe that fills in with social justice. I don't know. But--I think it's responding to the needs of our brothers and sisters when it happens. And don't make them wait. If you've got the resources right then and there to help somebody--I'm not saying be frivolous, because also sometimes you do need to do a whole lot more than that if you're going to be giving away more dollars, you want to know that it's going--like if you're helping with rent, you don't want to think it's going to be a monthly thing that's going on. That sometimes they need that month just to get caught up, because they had an extra doctor bill they weren't expecting. But you wouldn't want to foot the bill monthly. The same thing with utility bills--you want to help them out of a bind, but not make it a perpetuity, that kind of thing. So, in that sense, we're called to be wise. But there's times when you let wisdom go and you just give them the thing that they need at that moment.

[00:40:13.02] SHANNON GREEN: So, you were part of this ministry as you said, for many years. What was the--it sounds like it could be very challenging work. Where did you get sort of your life

energy? Did you have--what gave you life throughout that time? How did you take care of your spiritual life, all of those things?

[00:40:33.15] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: At Bishop Montgomery, they used to know me as the "Sister who Be's". I've always believed it's who we are, not what we are, that's important. They both go together. I've always--you have to have some type of spirituality, and I've been into contemplative prayer since I've been in my twenties. And going to contemplative retreats, and being around people of like mind and like heart, and sharings of the heart. I've always believed in storytelling--that's not new to me. I've always felt--the best experience I've had here in Carondelet as a Sister of St. Joseph, is when we had a weekend storytelling adventure. And at that time, I said, this--I always felt it was the rising of the phoenix--that the more we tell stories--that's how you get to know people. And I believed it enough so that I taught kids. I'd ask them when they came into the classroom, "Well, what did you see on the way to school?" "Nothin'." And they didn't--they didn't see anything. So, I said, well, you know--I taught them how to write a journal, and I learned that up here at Mount Saint Mary's--journal writing--but simplified it for the kids. Like into an original section and a non-original. And I used an example, like--I don't know about you, but if you've ever been driving down the street and you see a personalized license plate that cracks you up, or it makes you think. So, I started the kids with that--being aware when they come to school of something. And keep it--jot it down, same time of the day, ten minutes. It's not being graded--none of these things--you don't have to worry about it. This is for you. And I said, "It's not so important what you saw. The fact that you saw the license plate--the important thing--jot it down--yeah, I saw this. But the important part is your response to it. You'd be amazed at what those kids came up with and what I learned about young people. And the big thing I learned about them was, they're very deep--very deep. And they care about things. They wanted me to read their journals. I remember one boy--I can still picture him--I can't think of his name right now. But, at a very young age--because I was teaching freshmen and sophomores at the time--and when I taught them the journals--and he said in his journal, "You know, I don't think I'm going to live to be very old, because I like adventure and I live dangerously." He knew that. He was that wise, that young--about--different things came out. Or maybe--like, I also taught English--there in novels and stuff like that--there were great novels and what the kids would come up with--something that would touch them. And they'd put it down in their journal. So, journal writing to me is just like it's our--you start a spiritual journal. I've carried that throughout my life to different people, of what to do, and what you see. I told the kids, if you do that and you're faithful to it, first of all they're not boring like diaries. They're exciting. And secondly you go back over a month, backwards, and then read forwards. I learned that from [pro golf]--however [pro golf] when you're going back over stuff. Go backwards and then forward. You pick up patterns that you'd never pick up unless you did that. Like we know the grass grows, because you have to mow it every once in a while. And the same with the hair on our head--we can't see it grow, but we know we need a haircut. And the kids realized that, and they ate it up and they did--they flew with it. So--I loved--I liked everything I did, actually. But one thing opens up--one door opens up to another. Or one closes to you, whether you like it or not, and you know that's a sign you'd better move on. And you can also wear yourself thin, which you don't want to do either. New blood is needed--new ideas and new this, and that kind of thing.

[00:44:49.23] SHANNON GREEN: One thing I hear from Sisters all the time, and you're echoing this, is this--how to bring people in to being involved. Like I remember Sister Kathy Stein [Sister Katherine Mary Stein '71] said, "We see a need and we circle around the need."

[00:45:04.29] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Yes.

[00:45:04.27] SHANNON GREEN: Can you give an example of that, as you grew House of Yahweh,

or what--does that resonate with you or--?

[00:45:12.18] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I know this. If you need somebody, the way to do it is not twittering, in my books. Get on one-to-one, inviting people. I've discovered this about people. There's a lot of people that really want to volunteer or they want to do this that--but they think inside themselves, somebody's--you know, I wonder if I can do it. Well, it's our job, I think, first of all to be welcoming, and I think that's part of our charism as Sisters. I don't think that's hard for us to do. We just kind of do it--we are it. And the invitation--and let them know--like, some of the needs are different. The needs--you might be doing a party. But that party--when I say "pays off"--it does. I didn't--when I did a party, I did a big one, but we didn't pay for a thing. And I didn't have them pay for anything. It wasn't making something, it was bringing the families together. But there's lots of things that happen when you give a party, and you need different people to do different things. So, you know who they are, or you get them to sign up, or you call them on the phone and you say, I need this or I need that. If I ever needed money--and sometimes you need it, and you need it like now or yesterday--I had certain people that I could call, and did call, and told them what the need was. Or, sometimes I needed something and I couldn't wait to even call--like a big piece of equipment, let's say. One time we needed a walk-in freezer. I didn't have time to go around soliciting, so we bought it. And what happened--when you do that, the company gives you a breakdown of all the different parts that are in it and how much they are. So, that's what I did. I sent these things out to different people and asked them if they would foot the bill for those--break a big thing into small enough components, and you can get people to back it. So, whenever I had needs, it was the telephone, but the personal--knowing personal people, or knowing people who know people. And usually, the need is something that we're all feeling. I can't pull one out now. Our big need was food, and it still is. And so, the big thing was going around making contacts with the managers--store managers. And then they break it down into department managers. Getting to know those people. When we first started out with a soup kitchen, and trying to get food, I would get into the garbage bins and show them food that they were throwing away, that if we had it we could make it into soup. You know, training, going out, personally doing things yourself, not because you feel you're the only one that can do it, but that you can give some example or take people along with you. So, they're enjoying--because there's something about it. I've got my energy because I like what I do. I think if I had to do something perpetually, well, first of all I don't think it would happen because we're wise enough to know that people flourish in something that they feel they can do. Or if they don't, that they've got the wherewithal to learn to do it, or willing to learn how to do it. And getting people--there are "people" people, and then there's people that do other--knowing people's talents is the other thing. And then letting--a lot of times people don't really realize--they don't see themselves. We don't see ourselves as others do. So, I think that's another job we have if we're running things, or in charge of things, is we can see somebody's got this talent or that talent, and you pull it up. You let them know. "Hey, you could do a good job with this." And you don't let them say no, you just, "Come over and let me show you." And they find out they can do it, and they want to do it. And then there's people who could sell the Empire State Building. And once in a while, you find a couple of those. And so, it all happens.

[00:49:11.13] SHANNON GREEN: Would you see that also in the population that you worked with that you were serving? Could you share stories of empowering any of those who were homeless, or were poor? Any of those kinds of experiences?

[00:49:23.18] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Okay, just going into our food program, which is still very strong--I've discovered this: you can get gifts in kind a whole lot easier than people giving you cash. People are hard put about letting cash go. But you can really get the gifts in kind, which is worth thousands of dollars. That's--I'm getting back to the food program. All of our

food--almost all of it--is donated by supermarkets. We have trucks that go around every day, picking it up. And I know--it's just astounding how much things are and the food that we give out daily to families. Now, a lot of those families don't want to be just--and the--our thing is, I was saying, cash is hard to come by. No landlord is going to take a gift in kind--they want cold hard cash. And the second--that's the most important bill, unless you have a big illness that's hit you--but usually it's the--you keep a roof, I say--keep a roof over your head. Because it's thousands to get you back into housing. And the second bill is food. So, I feel that by supplementing their income with food, the money that they would be spending can be put aside to help keep a roof over their heads. So, that's how I think, and that's how that program works. But the people don't want to just get it. They want--some of them volunteer a day, you know. The day sometimes is the day that they're picking up their food, but they'll stay with us with other things. You know, different ones--so it's--again, not just want to take, but they want to give back. And they do that through service, because they don't have the money. You know, that kind of thing. So, I see that all the time with the people. Or, you wouldn't believe some of the stories you get. And it just--like I--sometimes--I can remember one--I don't know all the details. But again, I got rent from Carondelet Center from Sister Diane and the Justice Group. And we're not talking little dollars when you talk about paying for rent. But I went to pay the rent for--I mean, to this lady--I took it--there's things you have to do. And what she told me--there'd been a murder--and it happens. You know, these areas that I go into, they aren't--always safe neighborhoods. But they'd had that terrible thing happen, where somebody was murdered in their family--that kind of thing. And it just kind of takes the wind out of your sails, when somebody tells you a story like that. Or they're going to pay you back or this--I don't--I say, here, here [holds hand out]. And not put another burden on them. Just having a funeral's another thing--that's another thing that sometimes--I won't go into the funeral thing, but it's awful when you hear that somebody's going to be buried in a "potter's grave". I don't want that to happen, so sometimes you can call a funeral place, and they will take care of that, that kind of thing.

[00:52:49.02] [Break in recording]. [Director's comments].

[00:52:56.21] SHANNON GREEN: Just if there's anything else about the many years at House of--when you talk about storytelling, and you go around and you're engaging donors and community, were there stories that you would always come back to?

[00:53:15.08] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't know if I always had the same story, but I always had stories. Because stories interested me. But I also learned this when I went out giving talks: there are people out there that really want to know "stats"--how much this, how much that, and what is this, and so forth. And they need to--those questions are legitimate, and to be honored. But for myself, what I did in the future, because to--that was not my bag. I mean, but there's a lot of people, and as I said, they deserved an answer. So, I prepared a paper that had those kinds of things on it, so they knew how many of this--so that by reading that if they had questions, it would be directed there and it would be things they'd want to know. Because I got my clues from the kind of questions they would ask. So, that we'd hand out. Because then, get into the heart of the thing is where you're talking about the people and the stories, because that's what--the one thing touches this [points at head] the other thing touches you in here [points at heart]. And when you're touched in here [touches heart] you'll support something. It helps--you have to have the two. But where you're really going to wake people up is by touching them in here. But when they can see the stats and that you're a legitimate business, and that--you know, the monies that they're donating are being well-used, you're going to find out people will donate. And they certainly deserve to know where their money is going. And I like it where--we had the "open door policy"--you know, if they wanted to come in and see what we were about, you could come and see. You couldn't go into the food--because there's health stuff, like that. Or we'd have an open

house, and give them a tour. And schools would come, and we'd take them--we'd divvy it up. Having taught school, you know how to work with a large number of kids--a whole class at a time. But we'd take them on a tour through the thrift store, through the eating area, through the plant itself, the garden--all these different things. And they--some people need more action. The younger the students, they want to see the place in action. And I think your donors like to see it in action too. And they certainly get the action when they come, because things are happening, and they still are--still are happening there. You know, that kind of thing.

[00:55:43.21] SHANNON GREEN: So, could you walk us through the different parts of the organization? Because I've heard you say the food program, and you've mentioned different things, but I'm not sure I still have the--but the full scope of programs and services that you--that House of Yahweh offers.

[00:55:58.26] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: As far as what's on, physically, for them--since in the last three years we've dropped the--we used to have a large--pretty large Housing program, meaning--and it was unique, because I don't think anybody else has done it. We had--I had a friend who owned a trailer park, and how that happened is a story in itself. But in answering it quickly, getting into the Housing part, as trailers became--spaces available--they're gold. You can't find land anyplace. We'd get first crack at it. And whether we had a trailer or not I'd take it. And then, people would donate trailers. So, it was housing in trailers--independent units where they felt safe. They had the key, they had their own restroom facilities and that kind of thing. And a whole program evolved around that. We don't have that now. We still do--the big program now is the food program. And it's all because of my background training in school and stuff like that. We hold the people accountable. We know who's coming. There are interviews before ever that happens. And then you've got the walk-ins that we also take care of. But we have a roster, so that we know who's the Monday people, the Tuesday, et cetera. And we keep track. Because if they aren't serious about coming, there's other people that need that food. We take--warn them, and then let them go, and let somebody else take their place. So, that program is going, and it's a very strong program. We have two women that really know how to run the program. And you have to--always you're being inspected by the Health Department and stuff like that. And volunteers that come in on their day, that kind of thing. And so, we also have the Thrift Store, which is--we built it. That's another--some other story you want I'll give you chapter on that one. Because we build it with one of those buildings you can buy and then put together, that kind of thing.

[00:58:07.25] SHANNON GREEN: This is the place on Artesia?

[00:58:09.11] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: No, we don't have that one anymore. This is the one on 147th Street.

[00:58:18.08] SHANNON GREEN: And you built it yourselves?

[00:58:19.22] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: The Thrift Store, we did. The other buildings were there or we got them moved on. Every one of those is an adventure that I could tell you about and was fun--And how we got it and how we brought it in. People said, oh, it couldn't happen. But it did happen. Moving a building in. We moved it in on broomsticks. When I had the professionals say, oh, we can't get it in. Just tell a man that and see what happens. They all work together and they all have fun, and it works--it comes out. It happens. The other programs--we have the office, where they interview people, they help them with--let's say--a portable health wagon--making contacts with other organizations. Big things. The big thing is putting people in contact with people--that's the big service. They can use our telephone if they need to use a telephone. I've got all that stuff written down--all the different--and there are a lot of internal services that are done.

Or resources that we--networking is another thing--continuous networking with other people in the area. Like St. Joseph's Center--when we needed to do something that I knew things aren't working out the way I wanted them to work out. Like, if you get hot weather going on, it's the end of the month, and it's full moon, that's no joke--but that combination--and monies are slow, because it's the end of the month--bad things--not good things can happen. People are more short-tempered, and so things weren't going the way I wanted them to go. Because we used to have about four hundred people who came and had hot meals when we had the Soup Kitchen. So, I knew I wasn't--I said, if that's how this is going to be, I don't want to be a part of it. So, I shut that part down, and I went over to St. Joseph Center. And what I pulled away from that was, we were doing everything right except this big thing that I came back with. They take reservations. So, all I did was split it up into three different times. Took us a month to do the whole thing and get it going and really get it going. Because I let them sign up for what area of time they wanted, and the whole thing just went smoothly. Even our staff couldn't believe that we were putting four hundred people through there, because it all ran smoothly. We didn't have that--the fighting that sometimes would take place, or things that you didn't want to happen. So, that's what--that comes through the internal part, or going out, finding out what other people are doing--that kind of thing. If later on you want more services, they're there. Because I was reading them the other day all the different things that we are doing over there, and it comes from workers inside there. Like, for instance, let's say that someone needs help with immigration. We don't have that skill, but we know where to send them. Those kind of things go on. And then, doing the interviewing for the programs we do have. Or somebody needs clothing or sometimes once in a while, you hear where an apartment's burned down, or there's damage. We'll give them what they need, like furniture--supply the furniture. We get wonderful donations. The House of Yahweh is located in Lawndale, but we're surrounded on the west by a lot of affluency. Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, Palos Verdes. And parishes that are really making it well. And they're not only making it well, they are very generous in supporting the needy. And House of Yahweh was--is well-supported by the parishes in the area. So, have I answered adequately?

[01:02:26.17] SHANNON GREEN: There's just one more question about that. As yourself, that experienced over many years, I mean, that housing situation in this area it's just--it's not getting better.

[01:02:37.04] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: No, it isn't.

[01:02:37.27] SHANNON GREEN: So, how did you stay hopeful and moving forward during that? What would you say to others, you know, who are engaged in that kind of work?

[01:02:48.20] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't know. I just know--I can only speak for myself. And I look at it this way: if you looked at the whole thing, you'd do nothing. It paralyzes you. If you were to ask me to clean this floor by myself, to look at it would seem, no, it's not possible. But if I took one corner at a time, and each square at a time, and kept at it, I would get it done. And I feel the same way about housing. You look at the whole thing it just looks like nothing's happening. And yet, I have to believe that it is happening--little, by little, by little. So, that's my thing. And that's what I would tell somebody. Because sometimes you come together as a group, and hey I'm having trouble with this or having trouble with that. Sometimes, just talking to another person--it doesn't mean you can solve the problem, but you can lighten one's hearts, and realize there is hope out there. You aren't in it by yourself. And things are happening. Just like our hair on our head grows--we know it is, and that's how I have to feel about what's happening with housing. You hear about it every day on the radio, and on television, and on the smart phones and all those things. And little by little, people are trying to do something about it. And we usually hear about what's not happening than what is happening. So, that's--I think that's something that we

could do to counterbalance what's going on, is to cite examples to people when they come up feeling like nothing's happening or my little bit isn't going to do--oh, yes it is. Your little bit is going to do something. And then give them an example--one little example at a time. And the same with us--choosing one thing and focusing on it, little by little, things can happen. And not to lose heart. And that I have to believe God knows what he's doing--[laughs]--what he's about and good--that's what makes God different than a--I learned this somewhere along the line--but that's how we know it's God, because he--only God can bring good out of something that is evil. And nobody else can. Satan can't do that. He can do his thing with evil, but only God can make a bad good. And I'm--and he is doing that all the time. So--.

[01:05:19.16] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything else about that ministry that you would like to share with us?

[01:05:22.26] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Well, stick with it, because it's needed. And you'll know if it's for you because--you asked where I get my energy? When you like what you're doing and you're around--and you--things don't even seem to be happening. But if you believe in what you're about, and that--that's the inner drive. And knowing--I believe this--that if God believes and wants you to do what you're doing, it'll go, and nobody can bring it down. On the other hand, no matter how good a thing looks, or how thriving you think it is, if you're not doing God's will, it is not going to thrive. And I really believe that. So therefore, when things don't go maybe like I want them to go or whatever, I'm trusting God. He knows what he's doing. And as far as the House of Yahweh goes, it's going well. And if any of you ever want to go there, go see it, and be--maybe become a part of it, especially if you live in the South Bay. So--but most of all--I love being up here in Carondelet Center. Because I'm retired from the House of Yahweh, but my privilege now--and it is a privilege--is just to be present. I think we really honor people by our presence. And that's what I get to be--a presence. And I'm getting a whole lot more than anybody else. But I get to go--I don't have a time element. When I was at the House of Yahweh, I'd be going here and going there, and I usually could never get any place without being stopped. And nobody had a short story. [laughs]. Now it doesn't matter to me. I don't care whether it's a short story or a long story. But just like we are sharing here, that's what happens when we start sharing stories and adventures. And the Sisters up here are--I just--I'm really touched and inspired by them. And that I'm one of them. [laughs]. I'm one of them. And we don't have a lot--we say we love you and this and that, but I do love the Sister of St. Joseph. And I love being one. And I'm--life continues to be an adventure for me.

[01:07:50.12] SHANNON GREEN: Do you have any feelings or reflections about the future, in terms of the Sisters, the charism, religious life? Hopes, anxieties?

[01:08:00.19] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: You might have the wrong person, because I'm not--I don't worry about things, but I don't just think they're going to happen either. You have to have people there that--and I trust we've got good leadership, we've got people with good hearts, we're all going, thrusting towards. But also, things are changing, and I think we're wise enough to know that. It has changed already in our lifetimes. You used to have a whole faculty of religious. Now you don't. You aren't going to find very many that have a whole faculty of religious, or even a religious there. But things are still going. The Church is still moving. And we're moving into other fields, and different things like that. So, I don't worry about it. In fact, I'm excited about the movement that's going on, because I--I just truly believe--the whole--one of the key words is "unity". "Unity" and "oneness" and "sharing" and "living together" and all those things. And those are--and they're nourishing things. And there's going to be struggles, you know, because we don't--it's--but now we are taking time to listen to each other's viewpoints. And it's not so necessarily--it isn't rights and wrongs. It's being able to really listen with an inner ear or whatever

it is, where we start understanding one another. And when you start understanding and really getting to know people and love them, those differences seem to work themselves out. And that's what I think's happening.

[01:09:46.14] SHANNON GREEN: That's great.

[01:09:46.25] [Director's comments].

[01:10:09.16] MARY TRUNK: Okay. I have a question for you. Can you tell me what is the House of Yahweh? And what I'd love for you to do is, in very short--the House of Yahweh is--and say that too.

[01:10:24.04] [Director's comments].

[01:10:34.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: The House of Yahweh is a social service center now. It evolved with just one thing: being a soup kitchen. But now it's more than that--food, clothing, and shelter are involved. And it serves--its purpose is to serve the needy, the poor, and help them become independent and able to get through the hard spells. Actually, the charism we want--there's a lot of disenfranchised people. And we want to somehow bring wholeness there. But it's serving--food, clothing, shelter--reaching out to people. But also letting them know it's a two-way stretch in helping each other. We're getting help also.

[01:11:28.08] MARY TRUNK: I know both you and the Sister before--we interviewed just before you--you both mentioned that you didn't want to be identified as a Sister. And you told a story about how someone your age was in awe of you.

[01:11:49.03] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Oh, that's when I was young, before when I was in the habit.

[01:11:51.10] MARY TRUNK: Right--the same thing, because I feel like there's something--some connection between what it means to be a CSJ, working with the dear neighbor, and why it is important to not be identified as a Sister? I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that.

[01:12:06.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Well, I'm not one going to be one that says I didn't want to be identified as a Sister.

[01:12:10.15] MARY TRUNK: Well, not necessarily identified, but maybe recognized as someone that was wearing a habit or that had a status that was different than maybe the people you're taking care of.

[01:12:24.04] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I guess I've just never identified with not being one--or people seem to know what I was whether I was wearing the habit or not.

[01:12:34.17] MARY TRUNK: What is the--what is being a CSJ mean to how people--what is it about it that--helps you understand what it means to help people?

[01:12:48.29] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't know. I can't hang a label on it. I just think everything we're about--we're living--we are the charism, so to speak, which is service of the neighbor. I don't know. I can't--

[01:13:10.07] [Director's comments].



[01:13:19.14] MARY TRUNK: I'm just curious, because you had a moment where you didn't want to be--

[01:13:23.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: What?

[01:13:25.07] MARY TRUNK: --when the person that you said--

[01:13:27.23] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: --that was very different. And it was in a different context.

[01:13:29.19] MARY TRUNK: Oh, okay.

[01:13:31.13] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I hadn't changed my habit yet, and everybody was wondering why I hadn't.

[01:13:35.03] MARY TRUNK: Okay, I--

[01:13:35.01] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I was the last one to change mine. And I'm young and full of all this life, and they couldn't understand it--they thought that I was crazy.

[01:13:42.23] MARY TRUNK: No problem.

[01:13:43.09] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: So, that had nothing to do with how I feel now or later.

[01:13:45.15] MARY TRUNK: Okay.

[01:13:46.26] [Director's comments]. [Transcription suspended at Sister's request].

[01:16:01.25] MARY TRUNK: Tell me more about that. What do you mean by the whole thing?

[01:16:04.07] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I just think--by hopefully the way we act or live out our vocation, how we treat people--how we pay attention to them, that that is the charism. That's what attracted me to the Sisters of St. Joseph. But at the time, I wouldn't have known it was a charism. I didn't even know the word. But, so, it wasn't the charism--well, when I say that, as the word that drew me, it was the Sisters themselves. And the charism comes from our training, the things we read, the things we talk about, our--I'd have a hard time labeling it.

[01:16:44.27] MARY TRUNK: I loved what you said, that you're [unintelligible] to meet the needs of the moment. You don't like labels, it seems like.

[01:16:49.23] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't. But that doesn't mean that I--I'm going to throw out the labels--. But I--you're not going to find me as a person that definition be pinned down, now what's your definition of charism? What's your definition of that, or so forth? I'd have to get the--I think I'll start finding out what we are defining as that. Some other Sister, you could get them in here and I'm sure they could give you a very good answer to our charism.

[01:17:18.06] MARY TRUNK: I was--I think what you were--I love what you said, was that mainly labels don't have to do with meeting the needs. That you're meeting the needs, wherever they are--whatever is present, as opposed to labeling those. Is that what you meant by that?

[01:17:34.20] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't know, because it--we need to put it back in context. I really--

[01:17:37.28] MARY TRUNK: No, I really just like what you said--

[01:17:39.29] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I don't know. I just don't--the minute you label somebody--

[01:17:42.03] MARY TRUNK: --you're [unintelligible]meets the needs of the moment. Would you agree with that?

[01:17:44.15] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I certainly do. I still do try to meet the needs of the moment.

[01:17:49.05] MARY TRUNK: And I also like what you said, "it's who we are not what we are"--if you could elaborate on that?

[01:17:54.16] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Well, it's the who that is--that totally touches the heart. The what we do and what we've accomplished and all that--some people really like to hear all that. But I don't think that--and yes, it's great. And we're able to do these things because we are members of the--of a community, and we do have beliefs and live by the beliefs and give that hundred percent or whatever it is--if you're measuring anything. I never measured--you just give with no strings and all that kind of thing. I don't know--I need to get back to--

[01:18:42.06] MARY TRUNK: I think you said it quite well.

[01:18:44.06] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I just know that even when we--there's a big difference. Like when we go to a Mass for a Sister that's died, and the eulogy is read, everybody plays--we all--I am--I'll speak for myself--I really am listening even harder. I love our celebrations. I really think we know how to send each other off in style and grace and joy, you know? But when the eulogy is read--but what I've noticed is--a lot of it's accomplishments. This and this and that. But what really--you come up with is when we start getting into the personal, little stories. And when we have the sharings, before the funeral, it's the stories each person has to tell about that person that we listen and remember. At least, that's what I remember, are the stories. And so, it's a combination of the two. But it's who we are. The what doesn't necessarily make us who we are. We are it, whatever. The other comes with training this and this and that. And it's great to have things. But that isn't what you love about a person--how many degrees they've got or how many this or how many that. It's who they are that we love and can share. That something that emanates between people--it's the who, not the what. Sometimes it's our very talents that keep us apart. You can't hug a talent, but you can sure hug a who. [laughs].

[01:20:35.11] MARY TRUNK: Good point.

[01:20:37.03] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: So, that's kind of what--[unintelligible].

[01:20:40.09] MARY TRUNK: So, now I'm going to ask you some sort of fun questions that you can answer briefly, or not really like to answer them.

[01:20:48.01] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: What kind of questions?

[01:20:48.18] MARY TRUNK: Fun.

[01:20:49.25] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Oh, okay. If it's fun, go ahead.

[01:20:51.17] MARY TRUNK: What do you like to do for fun?

[01:20:53.01] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I like a good film. And I still like the ocean. I don't go surfing anymore, but I did up until--not on a board--I body surf. And I still find the ocean very exciting--not pools, but I like that. I like to play tennis. I like all the sports, actually. And that's--if I had an addiction, I'd have to say it's watching football. And it's the NFL [National Football League], because when I worked at the House of Yahweh, I chose to work on a Saturday, because I knew that most of my people needed their Saturdays with their--they were married and that. And I didn't need that. So, that cut out college football for me--I didn't watch that. But I really got involved and love--if you love something--I really enjoy a good football game. So, I do watch the NFL, and know the sport and that kind of thing. I like a good card game. Like reading. I like people that just like to jam--you sit in a circle--you know, whatever happens. You just start talking and you can't make it happen--it just kind of has a body of its own. So that's--and that's when I really learn a lot of things, is when you're--nothing's planned. You're just in a group and things start happening. Doesn't hurt to have a little cheese and crackers and wine, either once in a while, you know--[laughs]--together as a group. It's amazing what happens when you have a little sip of wine and a cracker. [laughs].

[01:22:21.28] MARY TRUNK: I love that. Body surfing--that is fantastic.

[01:22:25.29] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I loved that. I used to really like that. I'd go out with the guys--not in a wetsuit, because I wasn't doing that yet. And besides, they're--they use the boards, and that's at Manhattan Beach. I used to go at Redondo Beach, you know. But go out in the line--you know how when you're--

[01:22:44.20] [Video blacks out]

[01:22:44.20] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: --body surfing, you're in a line back there waiting for the waves to come in.

[01:22:48.00] [Video resumes].

[01:22:48.00] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: So, I did--I was quite at home with that. I liked it.

[01:22:52.27] MARY TRUNK: I love that. Is there--if there's a--is there a living or a deceased person you would like to meet--you wish you could meet--that you haven't met yet?

[01:23:09.18] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Oh, a person I have not met yet? Well, I don't know much about her other than I really admire her, and I have her picture--but I don't--I just know the wonderful--Mother Teresa [Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu (born Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, 1910–1997), Albanian missionary]--is kind of somebody. But you know--she really is somebody--a wonderful somebody that did something with nothing. But a person now that I'd like to meet? Well, no, I'd probably scandalize people with who I want to meet. [laughs]. I wouldn't mind meeting some of these top athletes, because they have monies to give and they are quite generous when they have a cause. And I think they--because if you follow some of them, they have big causes that they're footing. And they have the monies--the monies are there. It's just touching the right people and touching them in here [points to heart]. I wouldn't mind meeting Aaron Rodgers [Aaron Charles

Rodgers (1983–), American football quarterback, Green Bay Packers] or Tom Brady [Thomas Edward Patrick Brady Jr. (1977–), American football quarterback, New England Patriots]--these guys that are making millions. Or one basketball player--only because to let them know what we're about. But, you know, that's not too realistic.

[01:24:35.07] MARY TRUNK: I might be able to hook you up with Lebron James [LeBron Raymone James Sr. (1984–), American basketball player, Los Angeles Lakers].

[01:24:36.22] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: What about Lebron James?

[01:24:38.05] MARY TRUNK: I might be able to hook you up.

[01:24:39.17] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: That would be--

[01:24:40.13] MARY TRUNK: His [unintelligible].

[01:24:42.05] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Okay. Really?

[01:24:43.01] MARY TRUNK: My husband worked with him.

[01:24:44.11] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Really? That's neat.

[01:24:45.22] MARY TRUNK: But you're right.

[01:24:46.28] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: It's knowing--it's not what you know, it's who you know. But see, what you know--to who you know--it's not just what they're doing and how talented they are--they are, and they're getting paid the big dollars for it. But some of them need a little urging or just an openness of the mind so they know we're--because they really want to do good while they're alive. They know they can't take it with them. But they want to find and support something that they can trust and believe in. So, we've got lots of things--the Sisters of St. Joseph--that could be supported. These different side missions that are going on--different things like that. Or putting them in touch with somebody that's doing the wells for water. Just opening people's minds as to what they could do with the monies they have.

[01:25:38.16] MARY TRUNK: Making them aware.

[01:25:40.17] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: That's right. Heightening awareness. And so some of those stars--when they speak, people listen. And it's--like if Lebron--well Lebron James, he just opened his mouth at the wrong time just lately over China and the basketball thing. I don't know if you followed that or not. But it just shows you what one person has the power to do with speech. So, it's getting the right people. But as far as somebody that I'd really admire? I guess--I'd have to think on that. I have--who I'd really personally--just even here in our community, knowing different people.

[01:26:19.03] MARY TRUNK: Okay. I wonder if you--did you go to [Le Puy] France--did you go to the kitchen or--?

[01:26:26.11] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: No, I did not. I didn't.

[01:26:27.24] MARY TRUNK: Okay.

[01:26:28.20] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I visited it right here in that little room off the--

[01:26:32.21] MARY TRUNK: --with the banners and--

[01:26:37.01] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Where the--where the receptionist is, there's a model room in there.

[01:26:39.03] MARY TRUNK: Oh, right. Yes, exactly--that's exactly right. I was just curious if you--if we--if you had a story that might have taken place in a kitchen or something that you--relates to a kitchen.

[01:26:48.20] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: All my life--

[01:26:49.13] MARY TRUNK: [unintelligible] the kitchen that you [unintelligible]--

[01:26:51.06] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: I know this about a kitchen from my priest friends. My priest friend that really had a thing with people? He loved them. The first thing he did when he went to a parish was open his kitchen. All the action took place in his kitchen. And that's where actions do take place--is in a kitchen--around a table. And that's what I experienced here. We can't work in our kitchen out here, but we sure can work in that dining room. That's where food is, and where--that's where things happen. So, yes, and that's what happened in that little kitchen in Le Puy. Things happen there, and that's what I think about a kitchen. It's a warm place where people like to meet. Things--more things happen there over a cup of coffee than if you go to a huge meeting and you do this and you do that. Where it's really broken down and where things happen is with food and closeness in a kitchen. I don't if it's the smells of the food, or the warmth of the stove--I don't know. But I do know it's magic, kind of. [laughs].

[01:27:55.03] MARY TRUNK: I agree with you. What makes you feel your life was of value or is of value?

[01:28:02.22] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Again, it's crazy--it's just because I am. And I've felt--I've always felt I was worth something, you know? It's not something I sit down and meditate about. [laughs]. But yes, I think I have value just by being who I am. And how much--again, how much God loves me. And that you keep growing into. And you grow into it through the people that pass through our lives. They're the ones that actually--it's hard sometimes when you're dealing with God who is a spirit, not his son Jesus. But when you're with people who are other Christs--and that's what we say, and I do believe it--like when you meet a person and you hug them, I do believe that there's a transmission of energy from person to person--that kind of thing. So, as far as myself is, I think I'm of value because I hope that when I come in contact with people that I'm a good contact--that there's a good energy there. And I'm here on this planet because God got me here for a reason, and for that reason I think I have value.

[01:29:21.25] MARY TRUNK: If you could give a young person or a young woman advice about important--what would be important in their lives--something to do that's important--what kind of advice would you give a young person right now?

[01:29:36.21] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Well, it wouldn't be just doing something, although that's the easiest thing. You'd probably start with something to do, because we get engaged quickly with an action. But I'd go more into a prayer life--their own, that they learn how to be comfortable with themselves. Like to be still, not to always be in action. I think that's important, because I don't see that happening today. People are so busy going here and going there that--I

would point out to them the sacredness of--maybe not that word, but I do think it's sacred--silence. Maybe tell them to listen to the sounds of silence, the music. But there's something about silence--and I'm going to be dealing with the young person. But action alone is not enough. It has to be fortified with depth that comes--instead of being acted upon, the action has to come from inside out, not outside in. So, that's what I would be into with people. Letting them realize that we can't give what we haven't got, and we have to fill our little fountains from outside, and then it comes out. And it comes out in the action. And you'll know what action to take, because you're going to see with different eyes and hear with different ears, and all those kinds of things that happen when you're in silence. And I would tell them about the great geniuses. It never happens in action, it always--always happens when they're quiet. I remember reading something--I don't remember which guy it was. It could have been somebody like Carnegie--some of these big world pushers. There's one man that every day, he goes into one room, and it has nothing in the room but a desk and a piece of paper, and a chair. And he sits there for one hour. Nothing. And there's other people that do that kind of thing--they're still. And it's when they're still is when the most is happening. When you think nothing's happening, that's when the great thing is happening. And then it comes out in some type of an action or whatever. But it has to be inside out, not outside in. That's what I think.

[01:32:16.15] [Director's comments].

[01:32:45.11] SHANNON GREEN: Could you just say, for you, who is the "dear neighbor" today? And if you can use the phrase "the dear neighbor".

[01:32:51.12] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: [laughs]. I don't parcel them out. The dear neighbor's a neat phrase, and I do like it. But I do like it--I think everybody's my neighbor. So that anybody I meet--sometimes it's just a kid walking down the street doing their Twitter job, and I interrupt them by saying, "Hi!"--something like that. [laughs]. I think everybody's our neighbor. And sometimes it's just meeting eye-to-eye with somebody walking down the street and you surprise them. Or a hello--but there's--so that's what I think about the neighbor. And just being aware--it's awareness again. Because there's neighbors and there's neighbors. Like all of the Sisters, we are neighbors, but we're Sisters. Then we can get--like I live in a home--in a regular neighborhood--poor neighborhood--it's not rich. And either side of me--to be aware of the people that are on either side of you and walking down the street and that kind of thing. Those are my neighbors at that moment. You go into church, and the person who happens to kneel next to you--sometimes you want to turn to them and say, "You know, I've been with you an hour, what's your name?" And at church now, they do have you turn around and greet yourself to your neighbor. But--because it's possible to be worshipping, which is the sacred thing--and then not even know the people. So, the neighbor is anybody we come in contact with. And the awarenesses have to come within ourselves. We have to be aware or we could pass right by somebody. And they're like invisible people. That can happen at a table, too. Where you're with a group of people, and you feel like you're invisible--that can--it truly can happen. And that's our thing, to be aware that everybody is our neighbor and responding to them.

[01:34:41.21] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything else that you wanted to share today that we haven't asked you about?

[01:34:46.19] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: What do I think of Carondelet Center? I think it's fantastic. It's a little heaven haven on earth. And all the people in it.

[01:35:06.18] SHANNON GREEN: Sounds like it's been a wonderful new ministry--next ministry for you.

[01:35:11.13] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: It's a case where I can just be who I am. And I'm around people who are who they are. And we like each other. [laughs].

[01:35:19.13] SHANNON GREEN: Isn't that great?

[01:35:22.07] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Yeah. It is.

[01:35:23.01] SHANNON GREEN: Thank you so much, Sister Michelle.

[01:35:25.23] SISTER MICHELLE MARIE MORRIS: Thank you for asking me.

[01:35:27.26] [Director's comments].

[01:36:52.07] End of interview.

## Interview Index

Project: Mount Saint Mary's University--CSJ Oral History Project

Interview Date: 10/17/2019

Interviewee: Sister Michelle Marie Morris

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Roman Zenz, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University

Location: Carondelet Center, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 11/19/2019

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:11.13] Introduction. Full Name and age. Birth name: Ann Lee Morris.

[00:00:34.24] Early life and family. Born Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Moving to California in 1941.

[00:02:32.17] Early schooling. at St. Cecilia's, Los Angeles, California. Meeting the CSJs. Sister Margaret Alocoque Callahan. Father Brady.

[00:05:00.25] Attraction to CSJs.

[00:06:05.04] Attending St. Mary's Academy. Sister's death. Moving back to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Attending Bishop Heelan Catholic high school. Father Lenz.

[00:09:12.12] Early vocation. Returning to Los Angeles, California to live with uncle. [Sister Eloise Therese Mescall (1919–2001)?].

[00:13:00.10] Early independence. Being an athlete.

[00:15:25.15] Postulant and novice life. Entering order (1951). Wanting to go to heaven. Taking religious name. Receiving the habit.

[00:17:30.19] Adjusting to rapid change. Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)]. Changing the habit. Young priest who was "awed" by her.

[00:21:13.11] Vatican II, cont. Working as parish coordinator, Holy Spirit Catholic parish, Orange County, California. Living with Irish Mercies [Sisters].

[00:24:02.24] Teaching in elementary school and Bishop Montgomery High School. Working on parish renewal. Learning about homelessness in South Bay.

[00:25:25.10] Parish experience. Working as lay ecclesial minister at Holy Spirit parish. Getting volunteers. Vatican II--receiving Communion in the hand. Sisters better prepared to teach religion than priests.

[00:29:04.08] Feeling "God's finger" on her. Starting House of Yahweh. Making helpful contacts.

[00:32:04.17] Story about obtaining bulk mail permit for House of Yahweh. CSJ provincials: Catherine Marie Kreta '61 and Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy. Sister Patricia Rosholt aka Sister Mary



Ellen Rosholt]. Sister Diane Smith, CSJ Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator. Support from CSJ community.

[00:34:59.18] Origin of name "House of Yahweh".

[00:36:21.14] Social justice. Clean water for all. Housing for the homeless. Responding to needs of the poor.

[00:40:13.02] Spiritual life and maintaining energy. "Sister who Be's". Storytelling. Teaching journal writing to young students. Example of hair on our heads growing.

[00:44:49.23] Encouraging involvement of others. Sister Katherine Mary Stein '71 quote: "We see a need and we circle around the need." Meeting people one-on-one. Breaking big problems into small pieces. Encouraging supermarkets to donate discarded food for soup.

[00:49:11.13] Empowering the homeless. Gifts in kind. Homeless giving back as volunteers. Story of needy family whose family member was murdered.

[00:52:56.21] Storytelling. Touching the head vs. touching the heart. Giving donors statistics. Leading tours of House of Yahweh.

[00:55:43.21] House of Yahweh organization. Housing program. Obtaining trailers. Food program and scheduling. Thrift Store.

[00:58:18.08] Building the Thrift Store. Putting needy in contact with services. St. Joseph's Center. Changing food scheduling to avoid fights. Providing furniture. Support from nearby parishes.

[01:02:26.17] Housing in Los Angeles. Breaking tasks into small pieces. Remembering that change is happening even when you don't see it. Only God can bring good out of evil.

[01:05:19.16] Persistence in ministry. Believing in ministry. Trusting God.

[01:07:50.12] Reflections on future of religious life and charism.

[01:10:09.16] Short statement on purpose of House of Yahweh.

[01:11:28.08] Questions about identification as a Sister. [Some sections not transcribed at Sister's request].

[01:16:01.25] Charism. Meeting the needs of the moment.

[01:17:49.05] Who we are vs. what we are. Example of eulogies for Sisters--storytelling touching the heart.

[01:20:51.17] Brief questions. Fun activities. Body surfing. Watching football. Meeting and talking to others.

[01:22:52.27] Living or deceased person she'd like to meet. Mother Teresa [Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu (born Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, 1910–1997), Albanian missionary]. Aaron Rodgers [Aaron Charles Rodgers (1983–), American football quarterback, Green Bay Packers]. Tom Brady [Thomas Edward Patrick Brady Jr. (1977–), American football quarterback, New England Patriots]. LeBron James

[LeBron Raymone James Sr. (1984–), American basketball player, Los Angeles Lakers]. Encouraging wealthy sports people to contribute.

[01:26:19.03] Sisters in Le Puy, France. Things happen in kitchens.

[01:27:55.03] Things that make life feel of value.

[01:29:21.25] Advice to young people. Silence. Action from the inside out.

[01:32:45.11] The "dear neighbor". Carondelet Center.

[01:36:52.07] End of interview.